

With L. N. Tolstoy During the Famine Year of 1892.

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An English translation of a fascinating and detailed first-hand account of Vera Mikhailovna's work with Leo Tolstoy during the famine of 1892 (jk).

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MEMOIRS.

Foreword.

In the last years of the past century, when Pavel Ivanovich Biryukov began collecting materials for the biography of Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, he also turned to me, among others, and asked me to record my memories of the days I spent with L.N. and his family during the difficult, famine-stricken year of 1892. I had preserved some letters and my own notes from that time, but, unfortunately, much was lost because several times all these letters and papers were confiscated during searches—some were returned, and some, of course, were detained. Then, upon my return from Canada, where I had gone with the Dukhobors, I lost a suitcase on the railway containing the letters most precious to me, which I always carried with me. Thus, Lev Nikolayevich's own letters to me were also lost.

I promised P.I. Biryukov to fulfill his wish, but amidst the bustle of life, I could not start this work for a long time. It was only in 1901-1902, when I was arrested upon my arrival in Russia, that I began writing these notes in prison. Over such a long interval of time, I retained little in my memory of Lev Nikolayevich's own words and reasonings, although, in addition to my personal, close communication with him, I was very often present during his conversations with various correspondents and people who specially came to listen to him, to learn his opinion on one issue or another, to talk with him about religion, etc. In those days of my early youth, I was more interested in the entirely new life for me that was taking shape around Lev Nikolayevich. His living image is vividly preserved in my memory—as he lived day after day among us; a whole series of his pupils and followers passed before my eyes, many of whom had already suffered the first major setbacks in arranging their lives according to his views and had begun to distance themselves from him.

Others, on the contrary, were in a state of their highest uplift and were ready, with selfless devotion, to go among the people and, together with them, strive to establish the "kingdom of God on earth." This was then one of the few bright phenomena against the backdrop of the complete public stagnation that prevailed at the time, and all these discussions and disputes happened in my presence; for the most part, I myself took part in them. Now, perhaps, the free, independent tone that all our youth adopted in relation to Lev Nikolayevich will seem somewhat strange. But Lev Nikolayevich's great merit, as a psychologist, lies precisely in the fact that he knew how to place himself with us in such a way that we not only absolutely did not feel the pressure of a strong personality, but, on the contrary, everything we said seemed very important to him, and he knew how to make us speak out to the end.

My memoirs are in places too personal because Lev Nikolayevich took the most lively part in these my personal questions and in the arrangement of my own life. And against this backdrop of personal memories, the dear image of the great man is more vividly depicted for me. I have preserved more records, as well as living memories, about the activity of our group in providing aid to the starving peasants, because I threw myself into this work with all my soul; working in the main center and occasionally traveling to the most remote localities of our district, I became thoroughly acquainted with the entire character and all the branches of our activity, and I myself took part in some initiatives. This experience may be interesting precisely now, when the same question, in all its horror, has again arisen before Russian citizens.

In 1902, I still could not finish these notes nor work on them. In prison, I became seriously ill, then I was released and exiled abroad, and current life again completely absorbed me. Now, after Lev Nikolayevich's death, I have again reviewed my notes. After such a long interval, I could not change anything in them, could not restore anything more in my memory, and they have retained the naive character of youthful recollections. I have only put them in order and supplemented them with what pertained to the last years of my relations with the Tolstoy.

And now, when every fact, every feature from Lev Nikolayevich's life is being collected everywhere, I considered myself obliged to contribute my share of labor to this common cause and to share the impressions I was fortunate enough to experience in my youth. And, perhaps, my notes will provide a few additional strokes for the biography of the great writer of the Russian land.

Chapter I.

My First Acquaintance with Tolstoy.

The difficult winter of 1891-1892 for our black earth region arrived. It seems a full 36 provinces suffered from crop failure; famine was expected. In Moscow, all sorts of circles and societies began to form to collect donations for the benefit of the starving peasants. Moscow society seemed to wake from a long sleep and began to stir like a disturbed anthill. Everyone seemed delighted with a new occupation, a new life.

I, along with my sister, was a member of one such society, consisting of the liberal Moscow intelligentsia. The society was quite numerous, most of its members were ladies. It held meetings, discussed the matter of providing aid, collected donations of money and clothing, but, it seems, still did not know how to approach the population itself. Should they send simply money, or flour, or perhaps better directly as baked bread—since, they said, the starving peasants might drink away money and flour—and to whom, and how to send it?... Finally, an appeal from some zemstvo doctor, Belyaev, appeared in the newspapers then; the society decided to send all its collections to his disposal. I was rather indifferent to all these discussions in the society. I was not averse to working, but I had absolutely no idea then of any work within the framework of such a society. Moreover, my mood and health were in such a state that I was generally passive and indifferent to

everything. But new and new news from all over Russia about the scale and horrors of the famine caused an anxious feeling and called me somewhere. Everywhere people talked only of the famine. I too could no longer remain calmly, and I began to be drawn there, into that whirlpool of need. Why, what I could do there, I had no idea; I only felt that I should not be in Moscow, in a warm room, but somewhere there, at the scene of the people's suffering. But how to realize this thought did not occur to me.

Once, one of the ladies from our society informed me that the Tolstoys were setting up canteens for the starving peasants and, it seemed, needed helpers. At the same time, she gave me the address where I could find out about it. I went to the address indicated to me. From there I was directed to M.A. Sabashnikova. The very luxurious house where she lived made an unfavorable impression on me, which did not dissipate even afterwards. She received me as a supplicant, declared that now, it seemed, it was no longer needed, but that if it were needed, she would let me know, and she wrote down my address. Of course, I waited in vain for this notification, and her cold reception completely deterred me from the thought of going to the Tolstoys. But my mother advised me to approach them directly and ask if they needed help in their work.

At first, this seemed utterly incredible to me: to go where no one had invited me, to impose myself as a collaborator, and to the Tolstoys at that. I was extremely embarrassed by the thought that they might think I wanted to go to the famine only because of them. The role of a supplicant, which I had already fallen into once, was extremely unpleasant to me. I had a completely negative attitude towards Lev Nikolayevich's ideas—as I understood them then—and was not interested in learning more about them—so, I decidedly had no motive to go specifically to him. I would have more willingly gone somewhere else—but where?

Finally, my mother managed to persuade me. I had to overcome a large dose of natural shyness to go alone to complete strangers. This was at the end of December 1891.

Sofya Andreevna came out to me. The glance with which she looked me over was not only unfriendly, but downright hostile. Later she said that, seeing my small, thin figure, she could not imagine that I could work seriously, and thought with annoyance that I would only be a burden to her loved ones. Nevertheless, she did not refuse outright, but said that I should come on January 3rd, when her husband and daughters would return from the country, as she herself could not say anything definite—she was not fully in the course of the matter.

On January 3rd, I went again. This time Tatyana Lvovna received me in the upstairs hall, but also rather coldly, although I spoke with her a bit more. "We have already opened up to seventy canteens," she said, "we do not dare to open more for now, as there are no funds, and for these we have enough workers, and besides, masses of people are asking—everyone wants to go to the famine."

I fell silent, because I was sure my case was completely lost. If they had such a mass of workers, then, of course, why on earth would they take a completely unknown young girl, without any recommendation and, moreover, having no idea about the work.

"However," Tatyana Lvovna interrupted herself, "come back in about three days, we will then clarify the situation of our work properly: perhaps work will be found for you."

I left, considering my affair completely hopeless. But a few days later, I was nevertheless again at the entrance of house No. 15 in Khamovnichesky Lane. How many times afterwards did I have to stand at this entrance, always with the same hesitant feeling! This time, as soon as I managed to pull the doorbell, the door opened, and a tall, stout man in a white sheepskin coat appeared on the threshold before me and asked: "What do you need?"

I raised my head and immediately recognized who was before me. Instead of answering, I quickly asked myself:

“Lev Nikolayevich?”

“Yes, what do you need?”

In a few, rather incoherent words, I explained why I had come:

"Yes, I know, my daughter told me. You haven't frozen too much?" he asked. I replied that I had not.

"Otherwise, come into the house, warm up, and wait for me, I'll be back soon. If you are not cold, then let's go together, if we are going the same way, and I will tell you what the matter is."

We set off. Lev Nikolayevich, to my surprise, looked at me already as a collaborator in his work and told me what it actually consisted of.

"You know," he said, "it occurred to me yesterday: we are in the position of people holding a large vessel, and from this vessel we need to pour into the tiny bottles and vials standing before us, without spilling a drop of liquid in vain and pouring into each vial exactly as much as needed. This is a very difficult task and requires enormous, most meticulous attention to each individual case. Well, you will see for yourself when you come, and when do you want to go?" he asked.

I replied that it depended on him—I was ready even now.

"Well, good, then come to us tomorrow or the day after. You will talk with my younger daughter. She will tell you how and what to undertake, and we will prepare letters and some necessary papers for you."

We parted. I had not expected such rapid success. Lev Nikolayevich did not even raise the question of whether they had funds or whether they could still open canteens.

The next day was the 12th of January, and I did not dare to go to the Tolstoys, because they might have a family holiday, and the following day I went again.

This time I was taken to the small room of Lev Nikolayevich's second daughter, Maria Lvovna, who received me very kindly and began to acquaint me with the work.

"And when have you decided to go?" she asked me.

“Why, even today. The sooner, the better.”

"Oh, you are in such a hurry. But that's excellent. While we are not there, one extra worker will be just right. You will not be very alone. My brother is in charge of the whole affair there now, and he will tell you everything you need to do. We will give you a letter to him. Then, there is also a very nice girl working for us, a paramedic. I am sure you will get along with her. She also does a bit of treating there."

At that time, Lev Nikolayevich entered the room.

“Papa," Maria Lvovna addressed him, "she wants to go today; we must give her letters to Ilya and Yermolaev.”

"Yes, yes, write. Write to Yermolaev to equip her properly: look what frosts we have, it's a long way to go. And I will go write to Ilya. Yermolaev, after all, has a lot of our warm clothing collected now."

And they began together to figure out what to dress me in for the journey and to joke about my miniature figure. Two pretty, fair-haired children—a boy and a girl—ran in and began to caress their father. He stroked their heads and answered their chatter absently.

Finally, having provided myself with the necessary letters and advice, I said goodbye to the father and daughter.

“We'll see you soon in Begichevka," they said to me in farewell.

Chapter II.

My Arrival in the Village.

A few hours later I was already in a railway car and felt terribly lonely and abandoned, for the first time in my life parting with my family for a more extended period. I remember that from Tula I had to change into some cramped, dirty carriages. I had to travel, it seems, on the Ryazhsk-Vyazma line. I was traveling third class. The carriage was unbearably hot and smoky with *makhorka* tobacco, so that everything was in a haze. The passengers were predominantly peasants, and, despite the late hour, many people got on at each station. The frost outside was about 25 degrees, if not more, and cold air in clouds of icy fog burst into the carriage during the long stops at stations. My head was spinning from fatigue and the *makhorka*, but my soul felt so light and joyful, as I had not experienced for a long time. The initial sadness of parting with my family had flown away, and I was already mentally transported to the sphere of my new activity.

My neighbors began asking me where and why I was going. At first I answered very reservedly, but then I couldn't hold back and frankly began to tell everything: where and why I was going, and what I had heard and read in the newspapers. I didn't even know that I was traveling through an equally needy district of Tula province. Soon I found myself in the middle of the carriage, surrounded by a crowd of peasants, mostly men. I was telling them something, saw around me sympathetic, excited faces listening curiously to my words. Occasionally someone's voice was heard, stopping neighbors from smoking near me: "or else your tobacco will make her head swim," or pushing away the crowd that was already pressing too close around me. I had already forgotten about the *makhorka* and the fatigue and was all inspired by a feeling of some close communion with a new, completely unfamiliar environment.

What a young, completely inexperienced, exalted girl was babbling to a crowd of bearded, half-starved laborers has completely slipped my mind. I only remember that I was very sad to leave this stuffy and cramped carriage at the station. Some sympathetic good wishes were heard to me in farewell; my listeners carried out my things; and soon the station guard brought to me the commission agent Yermolaev, to whom I had a letter from the Tolstoys, and the hospitable carriage rolled on.

At the station, two young men introduced themselves to me. These were the Rayevskys, the owners of the estate I was going to, which was the central point from which the Tolstoys' canteens spread. The Rayevskys were leaving for Tula.

"Well, excellent," said Yermolaev, "you will spend the night at my place, and tomorrow you will go to Begichevka with the same horses."

I spent the night on a hard couch in Yermolaev's hall. The next morning he regaled me with tea and began to equip me for the journey—I was a complete city girl and had no idea how to dress for a winter journey in the fields. I had to travel forty versts, and the day was very frosty and sunny. But it seems Yermolaev tried harder than necessary, and I turned into some kind of immobile pile of fur clothing.

In the end, he fastened the fur apron of the sleigh and, giving instructions to the driver:

"Well, look, don't dump the young lady!"—said goodbye to me. We set off.

For the first time in my life, I was traveling like this, all alone, among vast plains covered with snow. All city impressions—the warm room, the soft couch, the pink lampshade—all that had flown away somewhere very far, and I was living with my whole soul already a new life, with new impressions.

There were very few villages along the way. But how these villages struck me! I was accustomed to

the suburban villages of forested areas, where houses are built of wood, and the wealthier ones usually of brick. Here, however, in the steppe, treeless plain, small clusters of tiny huts clung here and there, built of uneven stone and thatched with straw, in places disheveled, like an unkempt haystack, and in places even half removed. Later I learned that this straw was used to feed the cattle then. The huts were without chimneys, heated "black-style" (smoky). "I will be working in such huts," I thought on the way. I hardly spoke with my driver, as I was too absorbed in my thoughts. After a few hours of travel, he raised his whip and, pointing it into the distance, turned to me:

"And there are Gorki! We'll be home soon!"

And, indeed, soon we drove into the estate and stopped at the porch of a large one-story house with a green roof. In the house, one of the servants announced: "God has sent us a young lady!" Someone came out from there, and they began to unwrap me, which turned out to be not so easy. Finally, having extricated myself from my coats and furs, I explained who I was and why I had come, and said that I had a letter for Ilya Lvovich. A tall, thin blond introduced himself to me as Ilya Lvovich and took my letters. Then I was invited to dinner.

My first impression in this house was extremely unfavorable. After the cozy, family setting, everything here seemed so dirty to me; there were many unarranged rooms in the house, but at first I couldn't figure out which belonged to whom and where I could settle. Everyone was in felt boots—obviously, the floor was cold.

Besides Ilya Lvovich and the girl Maria Lvovna had recommended to me, I also became acquainted with another of my future work comrades, P.N. G. He was a quiet, silent youth; he had a good face and was dressed in the usual costume of Lev Nikolayevich's adherents—a grey flannel *kosovorotka* shirt, belted with a thin strap.

After dinner, Elena Mikhailovna—that was the young girl's name—showed me a room I could occupy, and then her own room, where she had a small medicine chest, and then left me alone to get settled.

My God, how lonely I felt! I didn't know how to settle in, knew nothing, where to get what, where to get water for washing. The servants in the house were only male—so everything had to be done by myself. All around were unfamiliar and little-understood people; and no matter how I kept my spirits up, a most childish longing for my native family tightened my heart more and more closely, and I ended up crying in my uncomfortable, unarranged room.

This calmed me down, and after crying a little, I went to Ilya Lvovich to ask him for work. He was engaged in some very animated conversation with Elena Mikhailovna, and when I addressed my request to him, they both simply laughed.

"You've only just arrived, and straight to work! And there's no work now anyway!"

I looked disappointed; what was I to do?

"Wait," Elena Mikhailovna took pity on my distressed appearance, "in the evening, when they have supper, I will go and show you the canteen in the local village, and until then, rest."

There was nothing to do, I had to wait until evening.

Chapter III.

The Beginning of Work.

The first canteen I saw made a strong impression on me. It was set up also in a black hut, of which there was a vast majority in the district. It was my first time in such a hut. It seemed very uninviting

and gloomy to me with its black, glossy walls. The hut was small, it smelled of smoke, and it was full of people.

We were met with bows, and some peasant with a beard as black as coal, black eyes, and an extraordinarily kind expression on his face, handed us a bowl with cut pieces of excellent, still steaming black bread. We tried both the bread and the soup, for which everyone vied to offer us their spoons. The people had already sat down at the table, and in this small, black hut, with the smell of smoke, it became very warm and cozy. The hostess, also a very kind-looking woman, treated everyone so welcomingly that one simply didn't want to leave them. On the way back, I remarked to my companion that the hosts seemed to be very kind people

“Yes,” she replied, “he is an affectionate peasant, but '*sebe na um*' (has his own mind/self-willed)!”

At that time, still unfamiliar with charity work, this word meant little to me.

The next day, I finally found work for myself. In one of the neighboring villages, in Gai, there was some misunderstanding in the canteen, and Ilya Lvovich was saying to Elena Mikhailovna that someone should go there, but there was no one. I overheard and offered my services.

“But you don't know anything here yet! You'll have to go without a driver. There are no extra people here.”

I asked him just to show me the way, and then I would ask further. And I know how to drive without a driver.

Ilya Lvovich agreed. It turned out that they harnessed a large *rozvalni* (wide sleigh) for me, which I had never ridden in before, and I couldn't manage to sit in them properly. This, however, did not bother me—I stood in them.

It was already towards evening, a light ground blizzard was rising. But the village was very close, and I had no doubt that I would successfully carry out the task given to me.

I found Gai fairly quickly, found the canteen, where people had just gathered for supper. My first more or less independent step gave me a few moments of true bliss. Here, in the hut full of people, I immediately felt in my place. Of course, I still understood nothing about the work itself; but I listened attentively to everything they told me, took notes, and we discussed everything together. I left with the most joyful and satisfied feeling.

I arrived when it was already completely dark. It turned out they had been worried about me at home, and a landowner who had arrived sent his driver after me, with whom I had probably passed each other due to my poor knowledge of the road.

In the following days, I took to helping Elena Mikhailovna in her medical activities and most diligently weighed out Dover's powders, which we distributed in large quantities to coughing boys who gathered in our front hall.

Little by little I began to orient myself in the work. I don't remember the details of what I did then, probably because everything was still not entirely clear to me, and nothing more significant, which would have left a strong impression, happened. We worked very amicably, like comrades. Elena Mikhailovna diligently treated the sick, and I often accompanied her on her medical visits and, where possible, tried to help her.

At that time, about 70-80 canteens had been set up in total, but some of them were in distant districts and were managed by other collaborators with whom I had not yet become acquainted. The initiative for opening canteens in this region actually belonged not to Lev Nikolayevich, but to his good friend, Ivan Ivanovich Rayevsky, who opened six canteens at his own expense, called “orphanages.” Wishing to acquaint himself with the state of affairs, Lev Nikolayevich had toured these areas in the autumn, which were then the center of the crop failure, and had then decided to settle here. However, he managed to realize this desire only at the beginning of November, when

increasingly alarming news began to arrive from the area. He went with both daughters to Ivan Ivanovich Rayevsky, taking with him from Moscow 500 rubles donated by Sofya Andreevna, and settled with him in order to "do, as he said, what God commands—feed, distribute, if there is anything." A week later he wrote: "Everyone is busy, and it's good. Canteens for the very poorest,—the girls have a school, and the desire, and attempts at help in all forms. I am very glad for them. The time is very interesting, the situation is tense and dangerous" {"Russkaya Starina". Series III. L. N. Tolstoy. Short biography of L. N. Tolstoy by P. I. Biryukov.}.

N.I. Rayevsky fell seriously ill soon after his arrival and died, and the whole affair fell entirely into the hands of Lev Nikolayevich, who expanded it to the enormous scale it reached by the end. Then Sofya Andreevna wrote her appeal for help for the starving peasants in "Russkie Vedomosti", and donations of money, grain, clothing, etc., poured in to the Tolstoys.

In the neighborhood, another landowning family, the F.'s, were engaged in the same activity, though on a much smaller scale. At the beginning of my stay in the village, only one N.I. lived there, a very energetic and active young girl. I soon became acquainted with her too. She lived alone in a small wing, where we, all those working in this region, often gathered later. I was very surprised that she could live there completely alone, but it escaped my attention then that she was the object of the most tender care of all the servants on the estate.

One fine morning, one of the collaborators from a remote district arrived to us, in whom I recognized my old acquaintance M.A.N. He had known me as almost a child. For me, feeling so alone among my new acquaintances, it was a great joy to meet at least one familiar face. "How our silent young lady has perked up, her eyes are even sparkling!" Elena Mikhailovna said quietly to someone. From then on I became much freer in my relations with those around me, and a certain rapprochement began between us.

Thus, in the two weeks I spent in Begichevka before the Tolstoys' arrival, I managed to familiarize myself in general outline with the work and more or less get used to my work comrades, who were almost all adherents of Lev Nikolayevich's views.

Chapter IV.

The Arrival of the Tolstoys. Organization of Work. Distribution of Clothing.

Towards the end of January, news came that the Tolstoys were returning. Ilya Lvovich had long been missing his family and was glad of the chance to leave. But this news rather disconcerted all of us. Obviously, our life was somehow going to change, become more serious. Ilya Lvovich was a bit agitated and even asked, half-jokingly, Elena Mikhailovna to put a bottle of rowanberry vodka in her pharmacy for him. She teased him and asked him to tell her about his father. I could little imagine what changes might occur for us, but I didn't want any. I was sorry to part with our friendly joint work, with our cheerful conversations in free moments.

Finally, they arrived. Sofya Andreevna also came with her husband and daughters. I was somehow even afraid to look at Lev Nikolayevich now. And Maria Lvovna was amazingly beautiful—serious, kind, full of the consciousness of important and necessary work. She began questioning me with interest about how I was getting on, how I had adapted to the work, and I immediately somehow felt in her a close and serious person.

From the very beginning, the work went more regularly. We got up every morning at seven o'clock, as the front hall was already packed with people. If we overslept a little, Lev Nikolayevich, passing through the corridor, would knock on our doors. In the morning we worked together in the front hall, sorting out the requests and needs of the gathered people. Then one of us would remain on duty at home, and the others would disperse to the surrounding villages, having always consulted first with Lev Nikolayevich. He was invariably up to date and always remembered every detail,

where and why one needed to go. But dealing with the people in the front hall always somewhat upset him and interfered with his literary work, and we, as far as possible, tried to anticipate his coming so that he could work at his desk in the morning. On such days he felt much better, calmer. But this did not always succeed, as he got up very early and could not bear to see people waiting.

Indeed, one of the darkest sides of our work was this front hall. It was packed from morning with all sorts of petitioners. It was impossible to examine a request thoroughly here. To determine the degree of need, we ourselves traveled through the villages and saw on the spot who needed what. The petitioners, to give greater force to their requests, reinforced them with various extraneous means, and Lev Nikolayevich had to experience difficult moments when they fell on their knees before him. Once, when a peasant dropped to his knees before him, Lev Nikolayevich also dropped to his knees.

"Well, if it's more convenient for you, let's talk like this," he said calmly. The petitioner, embarrassed, rose from his knees.

Another time, a woman threw herself like that before him. And Lev Nikolayevich at first could not understand her request for a long time. It turned out she was asking to have her child *removed* from the canteen. Usually, requests were of the opposite nature, and Lev Nikolayevich was very surprised.

"Let my own soul perish," the woman explained, "at home, there's nothing to eat anyway, but I cannot give up my child to perdition."

The matter was that in many parishes, priests from the ambo urged the people not to accept help from Tolstoy, because he was the antichrist.

"You think," they said, "that the antichrist will come to you with evil. No, he will come to you with good, with bread, just at the time when you are dying of hunger. But woe to him who is tempted by this bread."

It was difficult for the hungry people not to be tempted by it, and therefore few dared to follow the heroic act of the woman. And besides, the people did not seriously believe their priests. But there was much talk about this. In many places we were called the antichrist's children, which was not even entirely safe for the defenseless youth wandering alone from village to village.

People also came to us with completely unrelated requests, like asking for money for travel to Father Ioann of Kronstadt. It was from all these scenes and requests that we always wanted to keep Lev Nikolayevich away. They affected him heavily. And besides, he loved to write in the morning, and he was writing at that time "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," or "Christianity Not as a Mystical Teaching but as a New Life-Conception." This work of his was terribly precious to all of us. Sometimes he read us a finished chapter from it. In free moments we copied for him.

Somehow a rumor spread that a search might happen, and the work would be confiscated. We were already making a plan to save it. The work always lay in a certain place on the table; and whoever was on duty had to, at the first appearance of police in the house, take it through another exit and either carry it away or transfer it to the neighboring estate.

Sofya Andreevna was indignant that our rooms were so dirty and disorderly, and first of all, with her characteristic energy, set about restoring order. She herself washed and scrubbed the floors, a clean tablecloth appeared on the dinner table, and in general, a feminine, хозяйственная hand was felt in the house. Then she took charge of our famine relief fund, which until then had been managed by Elena Mikhailovna; she looked into our storerooms and saw that there were many different donated materials, dresses, linen, etc. lying there. People sent us all sorts of things, sometimes even completely unsuitable for peasant use. Among other things, a whole bale of very good, but too expensive knitted children's wear was donated.

The distribution of these rags greatly troubled all the collaborators, and no one willingly took on

this task. At the beginning of her activity, Tatyana Lvovna had to experience a very unpleasant moment in this area, and she had refused to distribute since then. Once, when she was in the village of Penki, she told two or three women to come to her the next day—she would give them some clothing for the children. The next day, before she had even gotten up, the whole yard was already full of women. It turned out that the delighted women couldn't hold their tongues, told the whole village about their good fortune, and so they all came. "We are from Penki!...

They say clothing is being given out here!" The women's eyes simply lit up at the rags. And the rags, moreover, were fancy, never seen by them before—how could one resist the temptation? I myself, as a new person, had not yet experienced this unpleasant and difficult side of the work: and therefore, when Maria Lvovna flatly refused to distribute clothing, and Sofya Andreevna proposed that I be her assistant in this, I, without any hesitation, agreed. Soon I had to regret this. Once we went, together with Maria Lvovna, to a remote village where canteens were only being planned. I took with me some clothing, mostly for children. In the village we separated to finish the census as quickly as possible.

Having finished my side before Maria Lvovna, I decided to give some clothing to the most needy. I had barely managed to take out two or three items from the sleigh and carry them into a hut when my sleigh was surrounded by a crowd of people, and it was no longer possible for me to either take anything out of them without it becoming known to everyone, nor to carry it into the hut to whom I thought it was needed.

The eyes of the surrounding crowd lit up at these rags, and on all faces I read a passionate desire to get something for themselves. The men here were not lagging behind the women, and all vied to give me various instructions. I was completely confused, all my thought-out plan collapsed, the crowd had power over me, and I stopped in complete bewilderment. Then Maria Lvovna rescued me. She arrived just in this critical moment, packed all the things, and we gathered and left fairly quickly.

It was a wonderful winter evening as we drove back; the full moon shone in the sky, but my soul felt such a heaviness, a consciousness of some kind of moral violence against others' souls. Maria Lvovna understood my mood well and was amazingly sensitive towards me. After this incident, I refused to distribute clothing and did so only in cases of extreme need. But this happened only after Sofya Andreevna's departure. She herself called village seamstresses, quickly made them recut all the cloth into *podyovki* (men's coats) for teenage boys and had them sewn immediately, before winter passed. She herself supervised the cutting all the time, standing whole days in a cold, unheated room. Her energy was astonishing, and soon many boys were strutting about in new *podyovki*.

Chapter V.

A Blizzard.—Rapprochement with the Tolstoy Family.

In the first period of my life with the Tolstoy, I somehow kept aloof from Lev Nikolayevich himself and did not hide at all that I was not interested in his views and convictions. This was not quite usual there, because, as far as I remember, no one came there who was not interested in him. I was interested in the work itself, and I was drawn to the people. But Lev Nikolayevich himself seemed to me too great a person, and I was afraid to approach him. I was also afraid that he might start talking to me about religion, and I would not know how to answer him. But he never touched on these topics with me. He treated me with the same attention as everyone else, and I was very grateful to him for not forcing me to talk about things I was not yet ready for.

But one day I had to get closer to him. It was on the day of a terrible blizzard. In the morning, the

weather was not very good, but still, Lev Nikolayevich sent me to a distant village to check on the canteen there. I set off with a driver. But the further we went, the stronger the blizzard became. The road was completely covered with snow, and it was difficult to see anything. The driver was a young boy, and he was afraid to go further. We had to turn back. But on the way back, the horses could hardly move. The blizzard was raging with such force that it was impossible to see anything a few steps ahead. The horses stopped. The driver got down from the box and began to lead them by the bridle. We were driving along the edge of a deep ravine. The horses were slipping, the sleigh was tilting dangerously. I also got out of the sleigh and walked, holding on to it. It was terribly difficult to walk in the deep snow, in the face of the blizzard. My face was covered with an icy crust, my eyelashes were frozen together. I thought we would perish. But somehow, with great difficulty, we made it to the village. I was so exhausted that I could hardly stand on my feet. In the village, I warmed up a bit and, when the blizzard subsided a little, set off back to Begichevka.

When I returned, Lev Nikolayevich was very worried about me. He met me at the porch, helped me out of the sleigh, and led me into the house.

"You are completely frozen," he said. "Go quickly to your room, change into dry clothes, and then come to me. I need to talk to you."

I changed and went to his room. He was sitting at his desk.

"Well, tell me, how was it?" he asked.

I told him about all the dangers of the journey.

"And you weren't scared?" he asked.

"Scared," I admitted, "especially when the horses stopped and the sleigh began to tilt towards the ravine. I thought we would fall."

"But you didn't show the driver that you were scared?"

"No, I tried to be calm."

"Good. That's very good. You see, if you had shown fear, the driver would have been even more frightened. And in such moments, one must maintain complete calm. This is very important."

He was silent for a while, then said:

"You know, I have been watching you. You work well, with soul. But you are too closed off. You avoid talking to me. Why?"

I was embarrassed and did not know what to answer.

"I see that you are not interested in my ideas. And that's your right. Everyone must come to the truth themselves. But I would like you to know that I am always ready to talk to you if you have any questions or doubts. Don't be afraid of me. I am not as scary as I seem."

He smiled his kind, gentle smile, and I felt that my fear of him had disappeared. From that day on, I began to feel much freer with him and sometimes even dared to argue with him, although my arguments were, of course, very weak.

Chapter VI.

Spring. The End of the Famine Relief.

Spring was approaching. The snow began to melt, the roads became impassable. The canteens were gradually closing as people could now find work and earn their bread. Our work was coming to an end. Lev Nikolayevich was preparing to return to Yasnaya Polyana. I also had to think about returning to Moscow.

Before leaving, Lev Nikolayevich gathered all of us, his collaborators, and thanked us for our work.

"You have done a great and good deed," he said. "You have not only fed the hungry, but you have also shown that people can and should help each other. This is more important than all the sermons."

He was very tired and looked aged. This winter had cost him a lot of nerves and health.

On the day of departure, everyone was somewhat sad. We had become close during this time, like one family. The Tolstoys left first. Then we, the remaining collaborators, began to disperse.

I returned to Moscow with a feeling of deep satisfaction. This winter had given me a lot. I saw the people's need up close, I saw how much good one can do with a sincere desire to help, and most importantly, I met a great man, simple and accessible, like few others.

Later, I visited the Tolstoys in Yasnaya Polyana several times. Lev Nikolayevich always received me kindly, asked about my life, and gave advice. These meetings were always a holiday for me.

Now, many years later, I remember that winter as one of the brightest periods of my life. And I am deeply grateful to fate that it gave me the opportunity to work alongside Leo Tolstoy and see his great soul up close.

V. Velichkina.